

# Empowering women in the EU and beyond

## Leadership and conflict resolution

Experts agree that much depends on women being involved on [an equal footing](#) in political leadership, as well as corporate governance, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict power structures. In most societies around the world, women hold only a minority of decision-making positions in public and private institutions. Yet for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN Women](#)), women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. Furthermore, the European Union has [increasingly recognised](#) that conflict and crisis management are not gender-neutral and has introduced numerous gender policies and initiatives to forward the aims of landmark United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#).

In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Resolution '[2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)', which includes 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). [SDG 5](#) specifically addresses gender equality. Advancing women's political participation is crucial for delivering on the SDGs and that is why the [fifth target](#) for SDG 5 aims to 'ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life'. In order to assess progress, the UN uses two indicators as benchmarks for progress: (1) the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments; and, (2) the proportion of women in managerial positions.

**17 %**  
OF EU-28 PRESIDENTS/PRIME  
MINISTERS WERE FEMALE

at the end of 2016

**6 of 20**  
COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST  
SHARE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL  
PARLIAMENT

are EU Member States (2017)

Women worldwide are still under-represented in leadership positions. Female [heads of state or government](#) are still a [minority](#), although the number has increased (from 12 to 22) over the past 20 years. Currently, only approximately [one in five members](#) of lower or single houses of parliament worldwide is a woman. Globally, [women's participation](#) in parliaments rose to 23.3 % in 2016, representing an increase of six percentage points over a decade. In 2016, the number of [women presiding](#) over houses of national parliaments jumped from 43 to 53 (of the 278 posts worldwide). Similarly, only 18 % of appointed ministers are women, and they are usually assigned portfolios related to social issues. This means that women are still [largely excluded](#) from the executive branches of government. They are also under-represented among senior-level civil servants, and seldom represent their governments at international level. A few factors seem to contribute to this under-representation: women are seldom leaders of major political parties, which are instrumental in forming future political leaders; gender norms and expectations also drastically reduce the pool of female candidates for selection as electoral [representatives](#). Although [much progress](#) has been made over recent years, the unequal gender balance is still somewhat prevalent even within the European Parliament where currently [only 37 % of the Members are women](#).

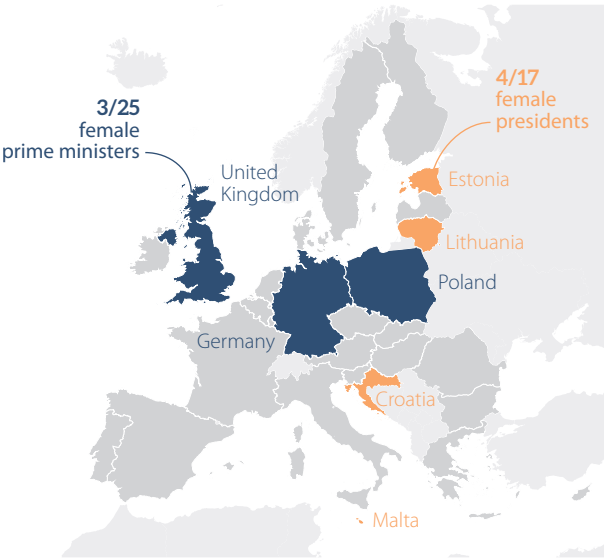
This briefing is part of a series 'Empowering women in the EU and beyond'. The others cover [the labour market](#), [education and reproductive health](#) and [economic and financial power](#).

Female heads of state and government

Women’s participation in political leadership in the EU was above the world average in 2015.

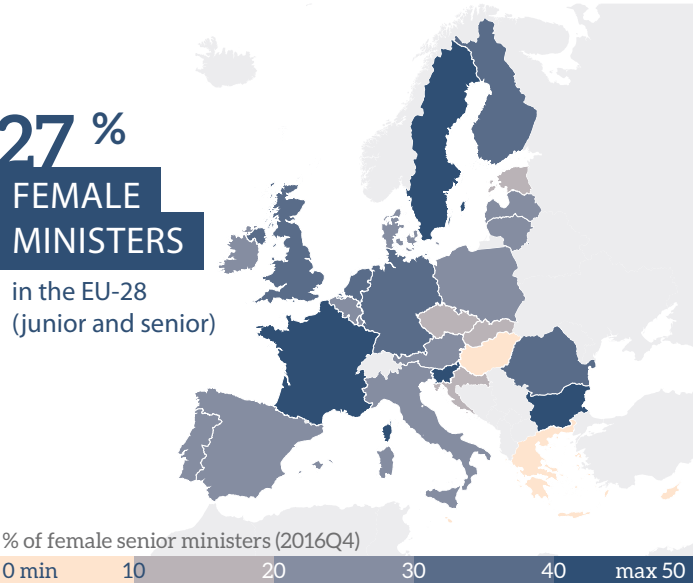


At the end of 2016, 7 out of 42 presidents and prime ministers in the EU-28 were women, compared to 4 out of 42 in the same countries at the end of 2006.



Female ministers

28 % of senior ministers and 26 % of junior ministers in the EU Member States were women at the end of 2016, up from 24 and 21 respectively, 10 years previously.

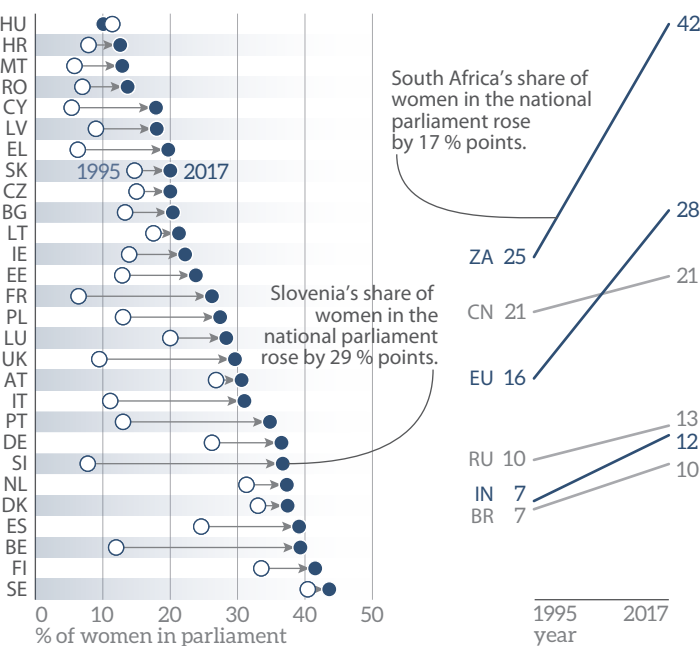


Women in national parliaments

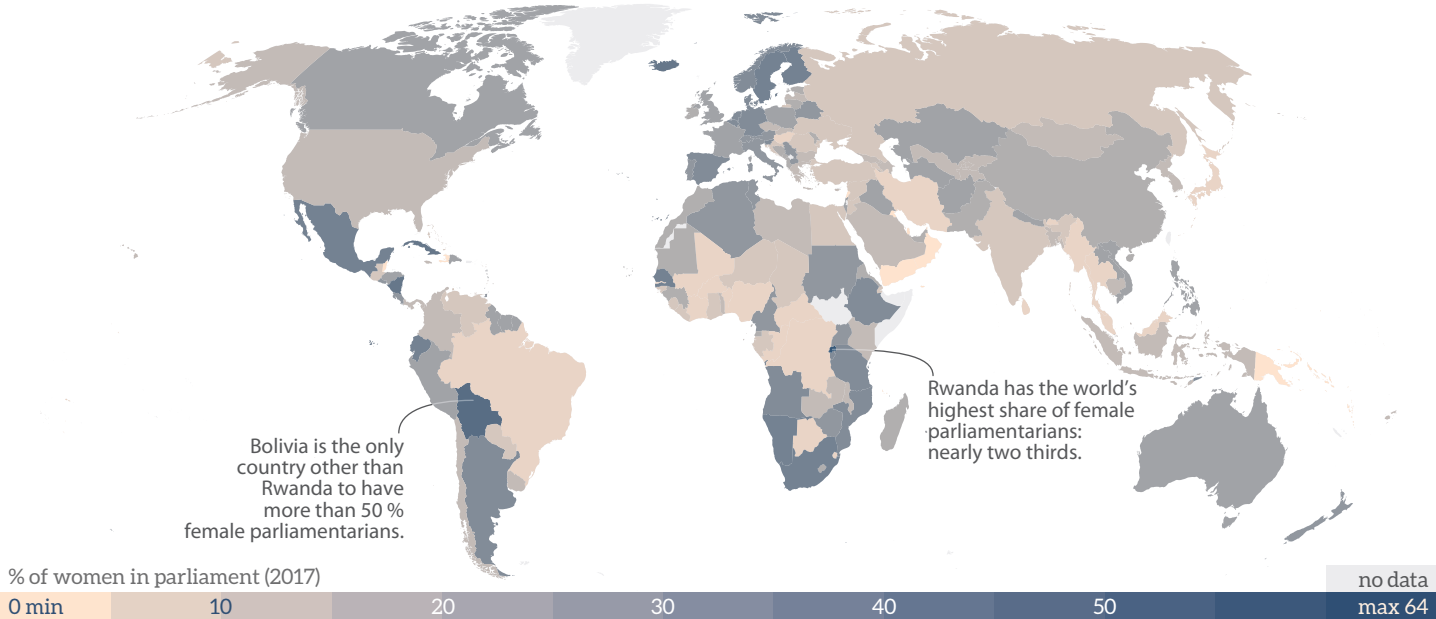
The share of women in the national parliaments of current EU Member States rose from 16 to 28 % between 1995 and 2017. In the European Parliament, this figure is even higher:



The Slovenian and Belgian parliaments marked the most significant increase with 29 and 27 % respectively.



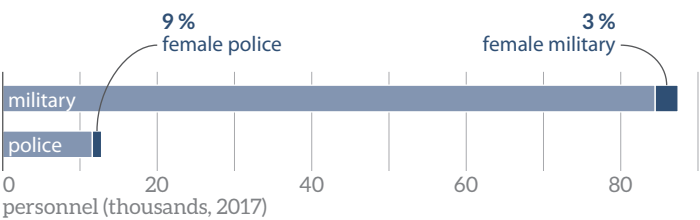
14 of the 20 countries with the highest share of women in national parliaments in 2017 are not in Europe.



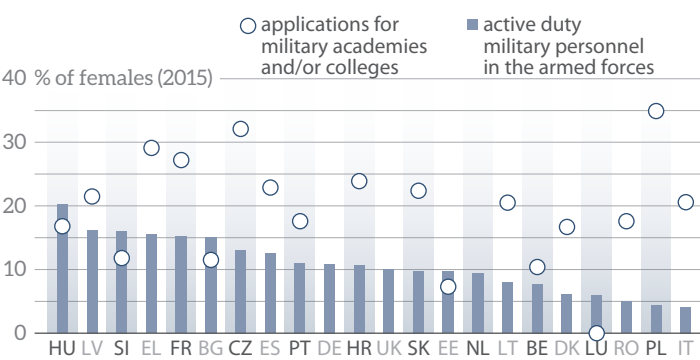
Women in the military

The more women are empowered to access leadership at all levels of society, the more they can perform an increasingly potent role as peace brokers and catalysts for change. Women play a [crucial part in peacebuilding](#) by mobilising across ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines; and have [unique access](#) in negotiating processes.

In UN missions, only 4 % of total personnel are female, while their share is higher among police forces.

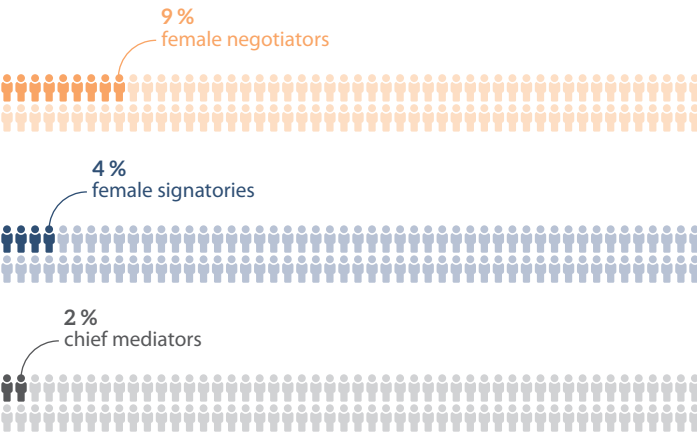


In 2015, 10.8 % of military personnel in the armed forces of NATO member nations was female. The share of women among active duty personnel ranged from 4 to 20 % among EU Member States that are also in NATO. At the same time, the share of applications to military academies and/or colleges submitted by women was roughly twice as high on average.

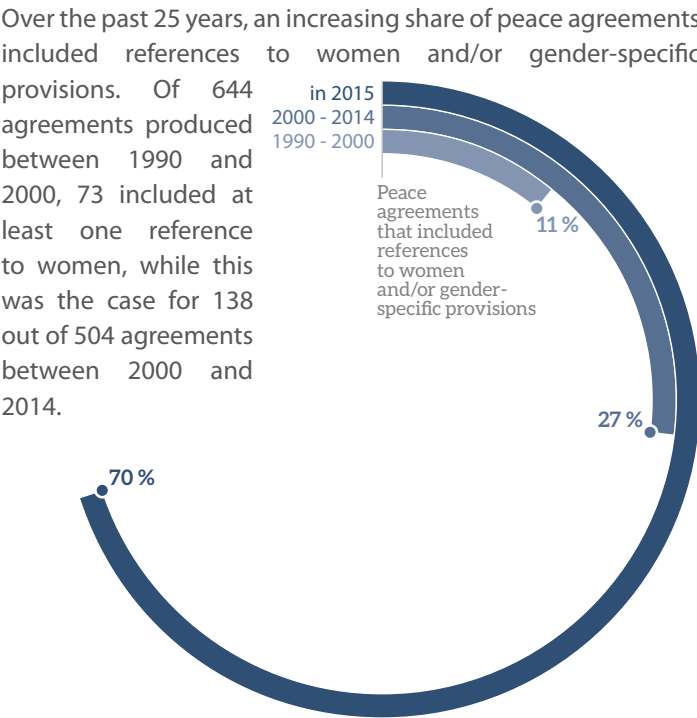


Women as guarantors for peace

Women’s involvement in the negotiations of peace agreements was low between 1990 and 2011.



Yet, women’s participation in peace processes has a positive impact on the durability of peace agreements. Data from 182 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011 show that peace agreements are 20 % more likely to last at least two years when women are involved in the peace process. The impact of female participation becomes even greater in the long term, increasing the likelihood of an agreement lasting 15 years by 35 %.



[Women and children are particularly particularly hard hit](#) by gender-based and sexual violence in conflicts, which has a long lasting impact on societies and often remains unpunished, preventing durable peace and reconciliation. However, there are women who themselves become perpetrators of violence and participate in political violence and armed conflicts – some as [foreign fighters in conflicts](#). This is in sharp contrast with the more generalised image of [women as targets](#) of violent extremism and victims of gender-based violence.

Measures addressing radicalisation need also to be gender-sensitive to prevent women from becoming radicalised. To this end, it is especially important to involve women in decision-making processes and in all fields of peacekeeping. [Women peacekeepers](#) have become key agents in mediation, peace-making and transitional justice. They have proved that they can perform the same [police, military and civilian](#) roles to the same standards and under the same difficult conditions as their male counterparts. In 1993, women made up 1 % of deployed uniformed personnel. In 2014, of approximately 125 000 peacekeepers, women constituted 3 % of military personnel and 10 % of police personnel in UN peacekeeping missions. While the UN, through its landmark [Resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#) and [follow-up measures](#), encourages and advocates for the deployment of women to [uniformed functions](#), the responsibility for the deployment of women in the police and military lies with individual countries. The 2015 [Global Study](#) on the implementation of Resolution 1325 found that women's involvement in peace processes increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20 % and the probability of it lasting 15 years by 35 %. Through its Resolution [2242 \(2015\)](#), the UN Security Council aims to build women, peace, and security concerns across all country-specific situations on its agenda.

## Global outlook

The inclusion of a gender perspective and the need to listen to women's voices when governments formulate their plans and strategies are inherent to the 'whole of society' approach. [Many political inroads](#) have been made by women as a result of gender quotas. However, women's empowerment should not stop there. More [support](#) is needed to equip women to translate the UN [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW) into legal guarantees of gender equality. Multiple stakeholders could also help to bring more women into government, train women leaders, and boost women's skills to participate actively in elections as candidates and [voters](#). The UN Security Council, in its follow-up to the implementation of Resolution 2242 (2015), will dedicate consultations to the topic of women, peace and security implementation, convene meetings of relevant Council experts as part of an informal expert group on women, peace and security, and invite civil society to brief it during its country-specific considerations.

## European Parliament position

On 13 and 14 March 2017, the European Parliament will debate the motion for a resolution on 'Equality between women and men in the European Union in 2014/2015', based on an own-initiative [report](#) by its Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee (FEMM). The report calls upon the EU leadership to take a firm stance in making gender equality a priority and to promote female representation at all levels of political and economic decision-making in both public and private sectors.

**Country codes:** EU-28 - Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Ireland (IE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Italy (IT), Cyprus (CY), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Hungary (HU), Malta (MT), Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Finland (FI), Sweden (SE), United Kingdom (UK); BRICS - Brazil (BR), China (CN), India (IN), Russia (RU), South Africa (ZA)

**Data sources:** Female heads of state and government (Inter-Parliamentary Union and European Commission), Female ministers (European Commission), Women in national parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union), Women in the military (United Nations and NATO), Women as guarantors for peace (UN Women and International Peace Institute)

**Notes:** GlobalStat is a project developed by the European University Institute's Global Governance Programme (Italy) and the Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation (Portugal).

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